



FrontLineSupervisor

Olympia 360.753.3260

A newsletter from the Employee Assistance Program

Seattle 206.281.6315

Spokane 509.482.3686

www.dop.wa.gov/eap

■ An employee has admitted to and been reprimanded for theft. I am now wondering if he can ever be relied upon to tell the truth. Can the EAP interview this employee, and perhaps give me an opinion as to his trustworthiness?

■ An employee just returned from working with the hurricane relief effort on the Gulf Coast. He seems withdrawn and I'm a bit concerned about him. Is this something to worry about and how could the EAP help?

■ Recently, the garage under our building was closed for a bomb threat, and we had to evacuate. When that happened, I reassured my team that we were safe. But deep down,

While there are many types of personality tests and other diagnostic tools that assess one's character, they are not designed to separate the honest from the dishonest person. Even if the EAP could judge your employee's character, it would not be appropriate to use such information in your supervisory role. Focus your concern on performance measures, and refer your employee to the EAP based upon his unethical behavior. The EA professional will assess to determine what your employee needs to do to act with more integrity. Talk to the EAP about managing a relationship with an employee you feel you can't trust. EAP will also help you look at your feelings of betrayal so you don't prejudice others or let your feelings of betrayal spill over into your dealings with others.

Many individuals have come back from working on the disaster relief efforts after experiencing things they have never before encountered. Whether this is cause for concern depends on the individual. Sometimes people need time to deal with the impact. Many find talking to an EA Professional, someone who will hear their story in a supportive, non-judgmental environment is helpful. Sometimes group sessions are helpful. A returning employee can meet with others who have returned and who truly understand what they experienced. As with any tragedy, it may be impossible for those who have not experienced this first hand, to grasp the impact. As a supervisor, watch for job related behavior. If the employee is having trouble doing their job to the standards that have been set, it is a good time to refer to the EAP.

Individuals who fear for their safety may not be able to concentrate at work. Ask the EAP about what help is available. Many people in both supervisory and support roles suffered mental health issues after Sept. 11, 2001, especially if they witnessed the attacks. Coping can prove particularly hard when bomb threats or similar disruptions arise during the workday. The EAP can promote resiliency and encourage participants to reduce or at least manage "stressors" effectively. Examples may include learning to assess

I'm as scared as they are. Can the EAP help us cope with this type of disruption?

and respond to perceived threats in a calm, rational manner and devising strategies to stay focused and maintain a healthy perspective amid surrounding uncertainty or even chaos. On a practical level, the EAP may suggest lifestyle changes such as reducing caffeine or alcohol intake and getting sufficient sleep.

■ EA Professionals obviously have relationships with people in the community, and some of them may be friends, relatives, or family members of employees. How can EAP clients be assured that their confidentiality won't be breached?

First, your EAP has a long record of providing effective, confidential services to state employees and their families. State and federal laws, professional licensing rules, and the EAP's own policies governing confidentiality assure this for all clients. Penalties can be severe if confidentiality is violated. Employees can be assured that their confidentiality is protected to the extent allowed by law, and that the EAP will not release information to anyone in the workplace without the employee's written consent. A few narrow exceptions may apply, such as if employees pose imminent danger to themselves or others. As a manager, explain that when you refer employees to the EAP, the only follow-up information you receive is outlined in the EAP Confidentiality Policy. Speak positively about the EAP and confidentiality. This more than any other factor helps increase your employee's use of the EAP.

■ I get visibly irritated when employees say one thing and do another. I'm not rude, but I make my feelings clear, and I'm not very forgiving. I'm apparently disliked for being "mean." But how else am I supposed to handle sub-standard behavior?

You may have heard the saying, "The meaning of your communication is the response you get." You may not think you are rude, but what matters is what others think. If you frequently seem irritated with your staff, you make it tougher to build trust with them. The next time you get angry, experiment with a different response. For example, you can summarize the situation in a pleasant but perplexed tone and ask, "Can you help me understand how this happened?" Another approach: Define what standard performance would look like and then ask, "Based on that definition, do you think what happened here qualifies as standard performance?" The more you invite employees to take responsibility for their actions, the more you will invite them to take charge of personal change. And by speaking in a calm, non-accusatory voice, you may avoid appearing mean. This change may take some time. Talk to your EAP about supportive steps you can take for yourself.

NOTES